

# COME FLY WITH ME!

Experience the exciting history of aviation at close quarters. Get up close and check out the details of these real flying machines. See famous and illustrious military aircraft such as the Mosquito, Spitfire, Focke-Wulf Fw 190 and the Starfighter.



The new exciting 3500m<sup>2</sup> civil gallery  
“LET’S FLY! – A JOURNEY THROUGH  
NORWEGIAN AVIATION HISTORY”  
opened in December 2016.

**OPENING HOURS:**

MONDAY – FRIDAY 10 – 16

SATURDAY – SUNDAY 11 – 17

OLAV V GATE, BODØ, NORWAY (+47) 75 50 78 50

**NORSK  
LUFTFARTSMUSEUM**  
[www.luftfartsmuseum.no](http://www.luftfartsmuseum.no)



# FROM MIGHTY OAKS

One of the most aesthetically pleasing aircraft ever built must be the versatile de Havilland DH.98 Mosquito, an aircraft that from the very start held great promise. It became one of the mainstays of the RAF during World War Two.

Created under a blanket of

secrecy at the Salisbury Hall shadow factory, W4050, the prototype, first took to the air on November 25, 1940. The first unit to receive operational aircraft was 105 Squadron, which received B.IV's just under a year later, on November 15, 1941.

It is an aircraft that earned respect

from both its pilots and foes, and remains popular to this day, still being known as the 'wooden wonder' – a nod to the main material of its construction.

This issue features three great features on the Mosquito, and gives an insight into the capabilities of this legendary aeroplane.

#### Top and above

The second Mosquito produced, W4051, is pictured while still with the Aeroplane and Armament Experimental Establishment. It was later used operationally by 1 PRU, 521 and 540 Squadrons and 8 Operational Training Unit, before being struck off charge in June 1945. In the lower view, a Westland Lysander and Vought Chesapeake are also visible. BOTH KEY COLLECTION

## 36 SOUTH AFRICAN 'MOSSIES'

Steve MacLean tells the story of how 60 Squadron (SAAF) was given crudely modified Mosquitos and its crews became photo-reconnaissance specialists, seeing action over the desert and in European skies.

## 44 A DANGER TO SHIPPING

The Mosquito was a devastating aircraft when used in the strike role – especially against shipping. Graham Pitchfork looks at the work of the Mk.XVIII-equipped Banff Wing as it attacked the enemy off the coast of Norway.

## 54 SEEING IN THE DARK

One of the highest-scoring night-fighter units in the RAF was 85 Squadron, which found its radar-equipped Mosquito interceptors were perfect for the job. Andrew Thomas examines some of the exploits of the squadron and its successes after dark.



# SOUTH AFRICAN

STEVE MACLEAN EXPLAINS HOW 60 SQUADRON SOUTH AFRICAN AIR FORCE (SAAF) EVOLVED FROM CRUDELY

*'Mossies'*

MODIFIED MOSQUITOS TO PHOTO-RECCE SPECIALISTS

**Below and top right**  
Images from the extensive record of damage to the refineries at Ploesti taken by 60 Squadron.

**Right**  
The underside of a PR Mosquito showing camera positions.

Too often, reconnaissance pilots are told to soldier on and make do with obsolescent or unsuitable equipment; yet the information they are tasked to acquire is vital to the war. So it was with 60 Squadron of the South African Air Force, based in Libya in the first weeks of 1943. With a fleet of Martin twins (three Baltimores and four Marylands – all of varying serviceability), operational effectiveness was becoming a hit-and-miss affair without taking into account enemy fighters and the weather.

A plea by 60's officer commanding (OC), Major Owen Glynn Davies, to General Montgomery, who led the British 8th Army, for Mosquitos had been forwarded to the RAF but was rejected. Davies also sent a request to General Eisenhower to utilise a B-17 Flying Fortress that could use defensive armament to hold the enemy at bay long enough to allow photography. An appeal to the RAF for fighter escorts was refused.

Entries in 60 Squadron's diary make tantalising reference to a captured Heinkel He 111 being modified and made available for operations. There is, sadly, no identification of the airframe involved, or its ultimate fate.

After victory at El Alamein in October 1942, Montgomery prepared to move west into Tunisia and attack the Mareth Line, built by the French before the war as a bastion against aggression from Italian-held Libya. Precise intelligence on this coastal choke point was essential.

Monty is believed to have said an attack on the Mareth Line would be "exceedingly difficult unless 60 Squadron was equipped with suitable aircraft" and that "unless his request was reasonably considered he would take the matter up with the Prime Minister".

## CUTTING HOLES

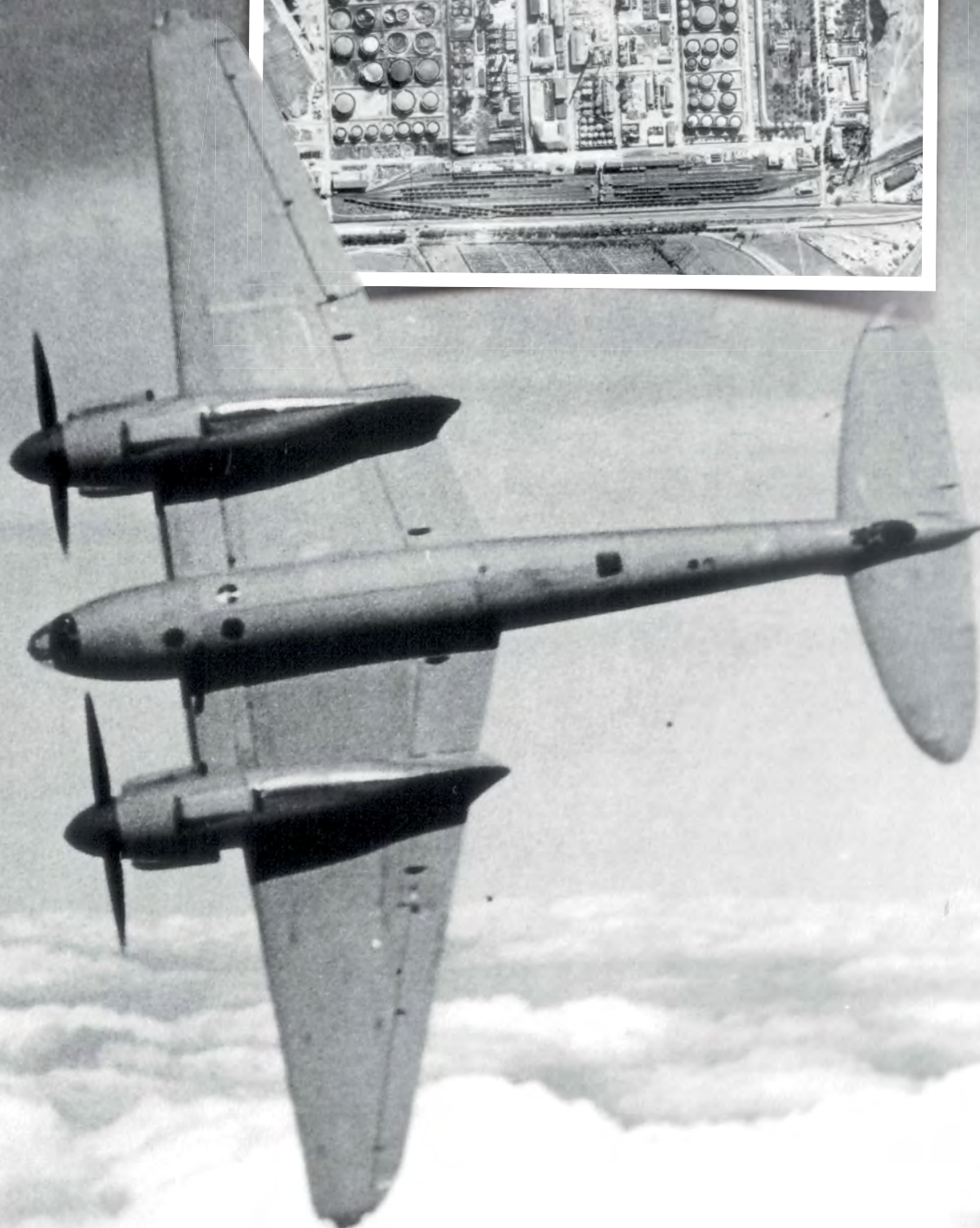
The unit moved to the Libyan airstrip at Darragh on January 22,

1943 and learned the following day it would receive Mosquitos. Two were to be collected from 107 Maintenance Unit (MU) at Kasfareet in Egypt. Two days later Davies, Lt Oliver Martin and navigators Plt Off Thomas Murray-Prior and De Bruyn arrived to find Mk.IIs DD743 and DD744 waiting.

Davies later recounted: "Why send me fighter aircraft when the RAF knew we required photographic models? How on earth was my navigator to line up for photo runs with a solid nose in front of him out of which projected four Browning machine guns and four Hispano cannon?" It was later discovered the Mk.IIs had been sent to the Middle East for weathering trials but were passed to the South Africans in an effort to appease Montgomery.

Handbooks or pilots' notes? There were none. Cockpit drill? That was the preserve of the delivery crew and they were enjoying the delights of Cairo. After a day's wait,





**“How on earth was my navigator to line up for photo runs with a solid nose in front of him out of which projected four Browning machine guns and four Hispano cannon?”**

the 107 MU's OC agreed to brief Davies and Martin before the two pilots each completed a 40-minute familiarisation flight in DD744 on the 26th.

**Right**

*Captain 'Pi' Pienaar and Lt Archie Lockhart-Ross surveying the damage to Mk.XVI NS520 following the celebrated encounter with a Me 262 on August 15, 1944.*

**Below**

*Part of the Obersalzberg complex, above Hitler's mountain retreat at Berchtesgaden, recorded with an F36 camera from 20,000ft on April 26, 1945.*

Next problem was where and how to fit a camera. With the help of MU personnel, Davies established a Williamson F8 Mk.IIB camera would fit under the navigator's seat, leaving the lens almost flush with the bottom of the belly. A long drift sight projecting through the cabin floor would allow the navigator to lean forward and put his eye to the glass.

After a short debate as to the merits of cutting holes in the aircraft skin, it was all systems go. Ten days



assisted in loading the Mosquitos weaponry. This became a regular feature of sorties over areas where the risk of interception by enemy fighters was considered high.

The first of several Baltimore IIIs were received on March 5 despite numerous protests at their unsuitability. The Mosquitos were ordered back to Egypt in May for the fitting of 10° oblique cameras and a new Fairchild vertical unit. The cannons were removed but the Brownings were retained. The opportunity was taken to repaint the aircraft in what the squadron diary called "midnight blue".

On May 30 the unit, now based at Sorman, was

**Right**  
*Lt Alister 'Shorty' Miller carried out the first bomb damage assessment sorties over Ploesti.*

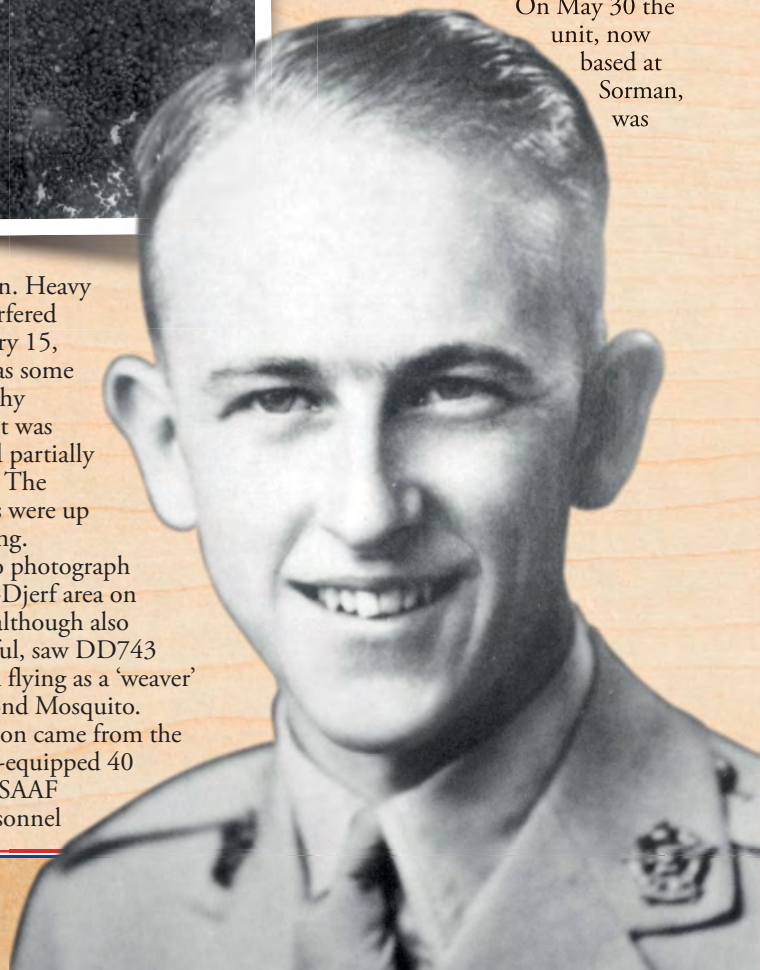
later a simple timing control system had been added and the Mosquitos were ready for the journey west. On February 4, DD743 and DD744 arrived overhead Castel Benito, where the squadron had moved. Martin effected an effortless arrival while Davies circled DD744 with a troublesome tailwheel. The OC had little option but to take a chance and dropped the aircraft on to the runway and was greeted with a thud. A third green light indicated the wheel was down and locked.

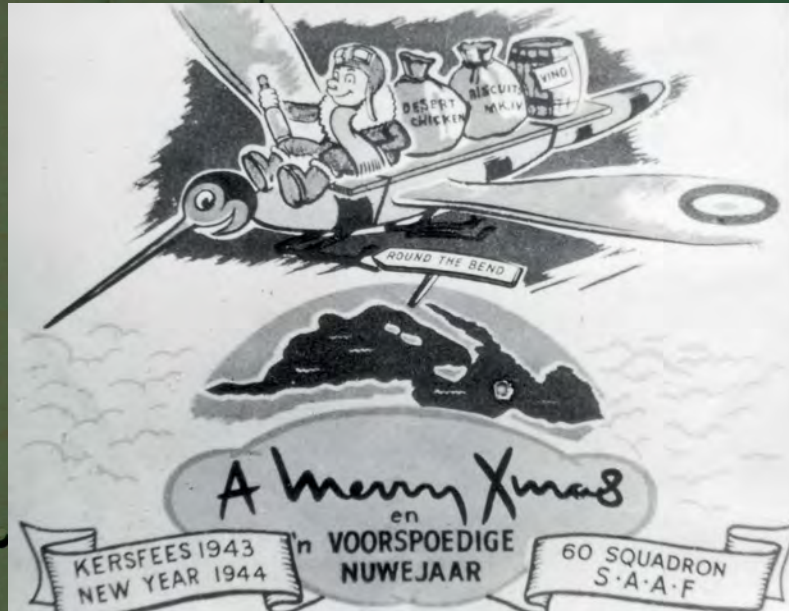
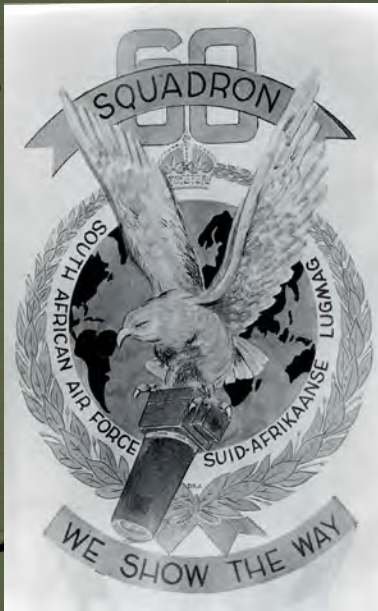
**UP AND RUNNING**

Four days later the Mosquitos attempted a reconnaissance of the Mareth Line, but radio and oxygen system failures in DD744 forced an

early return. Heavy cloud interfered on February 15, 1943 but as some photography was done it was considered partially successful. The Mosquitos were up and running.

Efforts to photograph the Ras-el-Djerf area on the 16th, although also unsuccessful, saw DD743 armed and flying as a 'weaver' to the second Mosquito. Ammunition came from the Hurricane-equipped 40 Squadron SAAF whose personnel





Left centre  
A version of the 60 Squadron badge; an eagle clutching a recce camera.

Left  
A 60 Squadron Christmas card for 1943.

**“On November 1 the squadron broke new ground with a first sortie into Germany. Airfields at Munich, Augsburg and a large marshalling yard at Innsbruck in annexed Austria were successfully covered”**

#### FOUNDING FATHER



*The first Mosquito converted for photo-recce duties with 60 Squadron was DD743.*

Mosquito DD743 began life as a NF.II and was eventually selected along with DD744 for weathering trials in the Middle East. It was transferred to 60 Squadron at Kasfareet, Egypt, on January 26, 1943. After ten days of modification, DD744 became an unofficial 'PR.II' at Kasfareet and became the founding father of the unit's photo-recce Mosquitos.

On July 5, 1943 DD743 failed to return from an operation out of Sabratha, Libya. Lt J van Dijl was lost while Lt G W Barnes became a prisoner of war.

*Major Owen Glynn Davies, 60 Squadron's OC piloting DD743 while attempting to convince doubting aircrew the Mosquito was a stable platform on a single engine.*

notified by the headquarters of 285 Wing that it would receive five new Mosquitos. The squadron was to comprise two flights: a photographic reconnaissance unit (PRU) and one for survey work.

The PRU Flight left for La Marsa, near Tunis, almost immediately. Three Mosquitos were made available pending arrival of the South African's aircraft. Serviceability and operational requirements led to the offer being only partially fulfilled, but it did introduce the P-38 Lightning to the SAAF when three were made available by the USAAF's 3rd

Photo Group to the PRU Flight for training. The first recorded flight in a P-38 was on June 18 when OC Davies completed a 45-minute familiarisation sortie. The first 60 Squadron P-38 operation, to the Rome/Naples area, took place on August 15 and ended with Lt Joubert badly damaging his aircraft on landing.

#### EUROPEAN SKIES

Mid-July 1943 saw the arrival of the PRU Flight's first Mosquito PR.IX, LR411, at Ariana, Tunisia. While detached to Derna, east of Benghazi, the results of USAAF

attacks on the Romanian oilfields at Ploesti on August 1 were recorded two days later by Lt Alistair 'Shorty' Miller and navigator/observer Lt Bill Allison.

This was one of 60 Squadron's most celebrated achievements given the distance involved, 1,800 miles (2,860km). Unfamiliar with the Mk.IX, Miller glided back to Derna when his fuel ran out short of the North African coast.

Miller and Allison completed a second successful visit to Ploesti on the 19th. This time they left from and returned to Nicosia in Cyprus. Intermittent sorties to the Ploesti and Campina oil facilities continued over the next few months.

A further two Mk.IXs were on strength at the end of August. Another arrived at the beginning of September and by the end of October the total was up to nine Mosquitos, including a solitary Mk.VI which served as a courier.

This coincided with a reuniting of the full squadron complement at Ariana and ushered in a period of reconnaissance sorties over Italy and the south of France. Heavy rain and frequent cloud over southern Europe meant successful 'ops' were more the exception than the rule. After October, the squadron moved from 285 Wing to the newly formed 336 Wing, under famed recce pilot, Wg Cdr Adrian Warburton.

On November 1 the squadron broke new ground with a first sortie into Germany. Airfields





**Above**  
One of the P-38 Lightnings used by 60 Squadron while detached to Ariana.

**Right**  
Mosquito PR.XVI NS738 at San Severo, showing the identification striping applied to the fin and rudder.

**Below**  
The squadron on parade at Sorman, Libya, in June 1943.

at Munich, Augsburg and a large marshalling yard at Innsbruck in annexed Austria were successfully covered. Bad weather plagued ops in November and attention invariably turned to the long-awaited move to Italy. This was achieved in December, initially at Foggia while 60 Squadron awaited San Severo to be readied. Work was completed between January 2 and 4, 1944 and the unit settled into its new base.

Weather continued to frustrate operations through the first half of January with crews regularly having to turn back, although occasionally points of interest on the flight home could be recorded. A mission to cover the coastal strip between Marseilles and Genoa on January 17 re-introduced the squadron to enemy fighter dangers when Lt van Rooyen was forced to take evasive action after interception north of Corsica.

All aircraft were grounded for three days after Lt Hartley suffered port undercarriage collapse on landing in MM255 on the 23rd. Down-lock pins on the Mosquitos needed checking.



### AUSCHWITZ IDENTIFIED

The first Mk.XVIs arrived from England on February 1, 1944. Poor weather and serviceability issues reduced the squadron's effectiveness during the month. On the 22nd Captain Peter Daphne and Lt Alistair Rodger completed one of 60 Squadron's finest efforts when they photographed the Focke-Wulf factory at Poznan, western Poland, during a six-and-a-half-

hour round trip of 1,700 miles in Mk.IX LR466. Capt Daphne was awarded the DFC in May. Both crew received a letter of special commendation.

No 60 Squadron's chief area of operations – southern, central and eastern Europe – was plagued by unfavourable weather in early March. Interceptions by enemy fighters against sorties which did take place steadily mounted.

Lts Miller and Allison went missing in the Turin area on March

1, while Lts Rood and Wessel failed to return from the Yugoslavian coast near Zara three days later. Neither loss could be directly attributed to fighter action, but this was deemed the most likely cause.

On April 4 Lt Charles Barry and his observer, Lt I MacIntyre, flew Mk.IX LR442 to four objectives in Poland. The last two runs were made over a synthetic rubber factory at Oswiecim. Unknowingly Barry and MacIntyre became the first Allied

**“Barry and MacIntyre unknowingly became the first Allied pilots to photograph what would later be identified as the Auschwitz concentration camp. Interpretation of the images revealed rows of people as well as the infrastructure”**





Above  
San Severo during the  
winter of 1944.

### JET ENCOUNTER



Lt P J Stoffberg and Plt Off Andrews assess damage following an encounter with a Messerschmitt Me 262 on November 26, 1944 west of Salzburg. With the port engine out of commission, Stoffberg managed to evade the attacker and make an emergency landing at Fano.

aircrew to photograph what would later be identified as the Auschwitz concentration camp. Interpretation of the images revealed rows of people as well as the infrastructure.

For decades these sensational images were credited to a unit of the USAAF. The error was only rectified following investigation by the Central Intelligence Agency in the early 1970s.

Accurate flak was a standard hazard but increased encounters with fighters continued to trouble the South Africans during the 135 sorties attempted in May. Lts Joubert and

Mervis failed to return from a flight over the Marseilles area on May 13, 1944 in Mk.IX MM256.

### FRIENDLY FIRE

The unit's diarist recorded: "The squadron was reduced to only six operational aircraft of which two will be due for a major overhaul within a few days. The two new Mk.XVI Mosquitos delivered on April 8 were not sufficient to make up losses... In view of the failure of the pressurisation system, the Mk.XVIs are being modified in the squadron for use as Mk.IXs."

Interception by Luftwaffe fighters tapered off in June only to be replaced by instances in which the Mosquitos were engaged by USAAF P-51 Mustangs and P-38 Lightnings. White and red diagonal stripes were painted on the tails of 60 Squadron's aircraft to assist identification.

To be fair to the enthusiastic Americans, their aircraft were equipped with VHF sets operating on frequencies outside of the capabilities of the Mosquitos. This issue had been raised at command level but appears to have received little consideration.

Further Mk.XVIs arrived during July, seven being on strength by the end of the month alongside the solitary Mk.IX and a Mk.VI used for training.

Several sorties to Poland were cancelled in July as the Soviet Union's advance gained traction through the region; in their place targets in northern Europe and Czechoslovakia received increased attention.

### SPECK IN THE MIRROR

Captain Salomon 'Pi' Pienaar and his observer, Lt Archie Lockhart-Ross turned on to the target line approaching Günzburg-Leipheim airfield in Germany at 30,000ft (9,145m) on August 15, 1944. Almost immediately Pienaar noticed a "speck in my rear-view mirror". Pienaar watched the aircraft approach. As it grew larger, he pushed the throttles wide open, pressed the button to jettison the drop tanks, and turned sharply to starboard.

The manoeuvre saved the South African's lives as the attacker opened fire and blew away the Mosquito's port aileron. Luftwaffe pilot Hauptmann Schreiber broke away for the second of 12 attacks over a period of 30 minutes. On the third assault the Mosquito crew managed to identify the enemy as a Messerschmitt Me 262 "painted silver with a large black cross below the fuselage and mainplanes and usual cross on the fuselage and swastika on the tail... The speed was phenomenal".

Pienaar managed to evade the attacker through a combination of exceptional airmanship and luck. He returned to base at San Severo, Italy where the damaged Mk.XVI NS520 was crash-landed. Both he and Lockhart-Ross were awarded DFCs for their efforts which included providing the first detailed Allied intelligence on the German jet fighter with a photograph featuring a silhouette thrown in for good measure.

The squadron was struggling with operational and serviceability ➔





**Above**  
A 60 Squadron Mosquito carrying wing drop tanks: both metal and wooden examples were used.

**Far right**  
Flown by Lt C J Mouton with Lt D Krynauw, PR.XVI MM390 suffered a run-away prop on landing at San Severo on July 15, 1944.

**Right**  
Departing Fromancona for San Severo in PR.XVI NS653 on June 13, 1945, Peter Daphne and Alistair Rodger lost an engine shortly after getting airborne and crashed. Both men walked away from the wreckage unscathed.

attrition and now faced the presence of the Messerschmitt jet. Lt Reid crashed on landing at San Severo on July 19, 1944 following severe engine vibration, while Lt Hargreaves and Airman Garrow experienced the starboard wing breaking off when their aircraft flipped on to its back during a



turn with severe starboard engine vibration on August 15.

The incidents increased. Lts S C Saunders and I H Impey were killed when NS532 crashed at Gioia during an emergency landing with a failed port engine on September 2. Major Allam and Captain Roth in MM366 and Lt van der Hoff and Airman Weir in NS627 crashed on take-off on October 29 and 30 respectively following port engine failure in both instances. Lts Mouton and Krynauw failed to return from a sortie to Munich in PR.XVI NS521 on August 26, presumed to be the victims of a Me 262. PR.XVI NS656 failed to return from central Czechoslovakia with Lt Sheldon and Fg Off Snell on September 13.

Of greater comfort was the fighter escort provided by USAAF P-51s

or P-38s whenever 680 Squadron RAF or 60 Squadron ventured to Munich or central Czechoslovakia. During November and December 60 Squadron completed a mapping survey of northern Italy, as well as providing coverage of targets in southern Germany, annexed Austria and Hungary.

### RETIREMENT

Mosquito PR.IX LR480 was issued to 60 Squadron at Foggia on June 8, 1944. It served a mere six months before selected for an attempt on the airspeed record between Cairo and Pretoria, South Africa. Lt-Col Owen Glynn Davies and Brigadier Peter Hingeston left Payne Field in Cairo at 0400hrs on December 14. They encountered steadily worsening weather before a landing accident at Que Que in Southern Rhodesia

(now Kwekwe, Zimbabwe,) ended the effort. This machine is preserved at the Ditsong Military History Museum at Saxonwold – see the January *FlyPast*.

On July 15, 1945, the men of 60 Squadron were withdrawn from operations, switching to a communications role for 242 Wing until nine Mosquitos departed San Severo for the flight to South Africa on August 22. Major Daphne remained in Italy with the tenth aircraft before heading south where he joined his comrades at Zwartkop, south of Pretoria.

Many personnel were demobilised in the uncertainty of the immediate post-war months. The Mosquitos were passed to 15 Air Depot for servicing and the squadron was reduced to cadre strength on January 15, 1946. There followed a posting of both men and machines to Bloemfontein, yet activities were minimal as the majority of aircraft were placed in storage.

Following the death of Colonel L A Wilmot when 4801 broke-up in flight on June 26, 1947 in an accident attributed to structural failure, the remaining Mosquitos were grounded pending inspection. Four were allocated to the Bombing, Gunnery and Air Navigation School at Langebaanweg on the Cape west coast but their career was limited. South African Mosquitos were quietly ushered into retirement in 1950. ●

Eighth in series

Detailed information on the Mosquito has changed considerably in recent years – more reference material is now available than ever before. Published in 2016 this title brings enthusiasts up to date with the type.

AIRFRAME & MINIATURE  
**No.8**

# The de Havilland Mosquito

**NOW AVAILABLE**

Technical information, camouflage and markings

Walkaround images, technical diagrams and wartime photos

Colour side views and four-views by Richard Caruana

3D isometric views of all bomber and PR variants by W Sankowski

1/32, 1/48 & 1/72 scale kit builds by expert modellers Libor Jekl and Steve Evans

A full set of fold-out 1/48th scale plans



**192 PAGES + PLANS**

by Richard A. Franks

192 pages packed with vital information that no Mosquito enthusiast should be without



Order your copy today for only **£18.95!** +p&p

[www.valiant-wings.co.uk](http://www.valiant-wings.co.uk)

+44 (0)1234 273434 (24hr answerphone)  
[valiant-wings@btconnect.com](mailto:valiant-wings@btconnect.com)

Part 2: Fighter & Fighter-Bomber versions coming in 2017!



de HAVILLAND  
AIRCRAFT  
MUSEUM



**— OPEN —**  
THURSDAY TO SUNDAY  
AND TUESDAYS FROM  
5TH OF MARCH 2017

## PRESERVING THE de HAVILLAND HERITAGE



- The only place to see 3 Mosquitos, including the newly restored Prototype
- View the Comet 1A - the world's first jet airliner
- Get close up to all our aircraft and meet our renovation crew

de Havilland Aircraft Museum, Salisbury Hall,  
London Colney, Hertfordshire AL2 1BU

**01727 826400**

[www.dehavillandmuseum.co.uk](http://www.dehavillandmuseum.co.uk)

**TWO  
FREE  
ADMISSIONS**

**VOUCHER CODE FP2017**

Special family offer - children enter free with two adults\*

\*This voucher can be used until 29th October 2017. Up to two children under 16 years get FREE admission when two accompanying adults pay full admission price. The voucher is not transferrable and is not valid for group visits. The voucher cannot be used in conjunction with any other discount offer or promotion. Photocopies will not be accepted.

# MOSQUITO

GRAHAM PITCHFORK EXAMINES  
ANTI-SHIPPING 'OPS'

Arguably the most versatile aircraft of World War Two, the Mosquito began operations in a Coastal Command strike role in October 1943 when 248 Squadron received a pair of Mk.XVIIs. They were equipped with a single 57mm Molins six-pounder cannon in place of the normal four 20mm cannons in

the fuselage, and were known as 'Tsetse' Mosquitos.

By the end of the year, the squadron had replaced all its Beaufighters with Mosquitos – most being FB.VIs – and began sorties over the Bay of Biscay in February 1944 from Portreath in Cornwall, attacking vessels in



# TO STRIKES

## *in Norwegian Waters*

the bay and the Gironde Estuary over the next few months.

In June 1944 another unit, 235 Squadron, began anti-shipping sorties with the Mosquito, joining in the hectic operations off the French coast.

Within weeks of the Allied landings in Normandy in

June 1944, the Germans were driven from western France. By September enemy maritime activity had almost ceased and it was decided to transfer the two Mosquito squadrons to Banff in northeast Scotland where they could combine to mount attacks off the Norwegian coast 300 miles away, together with the Beaufighter Strike Wing at nearby Dallachy.

Also arriving at Banff were Mosquitos of the Norwegian 333 Squadron which had been attacking targets off the coast of their homeland since mid-1943. The unit conducted shipping reconnaissance operations and armed 'Rovers' – low-level searches looking for targets of opportunity.

### STRIKE WING TALENT

Germany had invaded and occupied Norway in April 1940. This proved convenient for the seaborne import of the vital Swedish iron ore essential for German industry.

Over the following three years, Coastal Command developed an effective anti-shipping capability, its Beaufighter Strike Wings operating with increasing success off the Dutch and Norwegian coasts.

The Mosquito squadrons at Banff



**Above**  
Gp Capt Max Aitken,  
RAF Banff's station  
commander.

**Left**  
A Mosquito pulls out  
over the German-  
controlled 'Lysakeer'  
in the harbour at  
Tetgenaes.

added to this important capability, concentrating their efforts off Norway and in the sea areas of the Skagerrak and Kattegat between Denmark and Sweden.

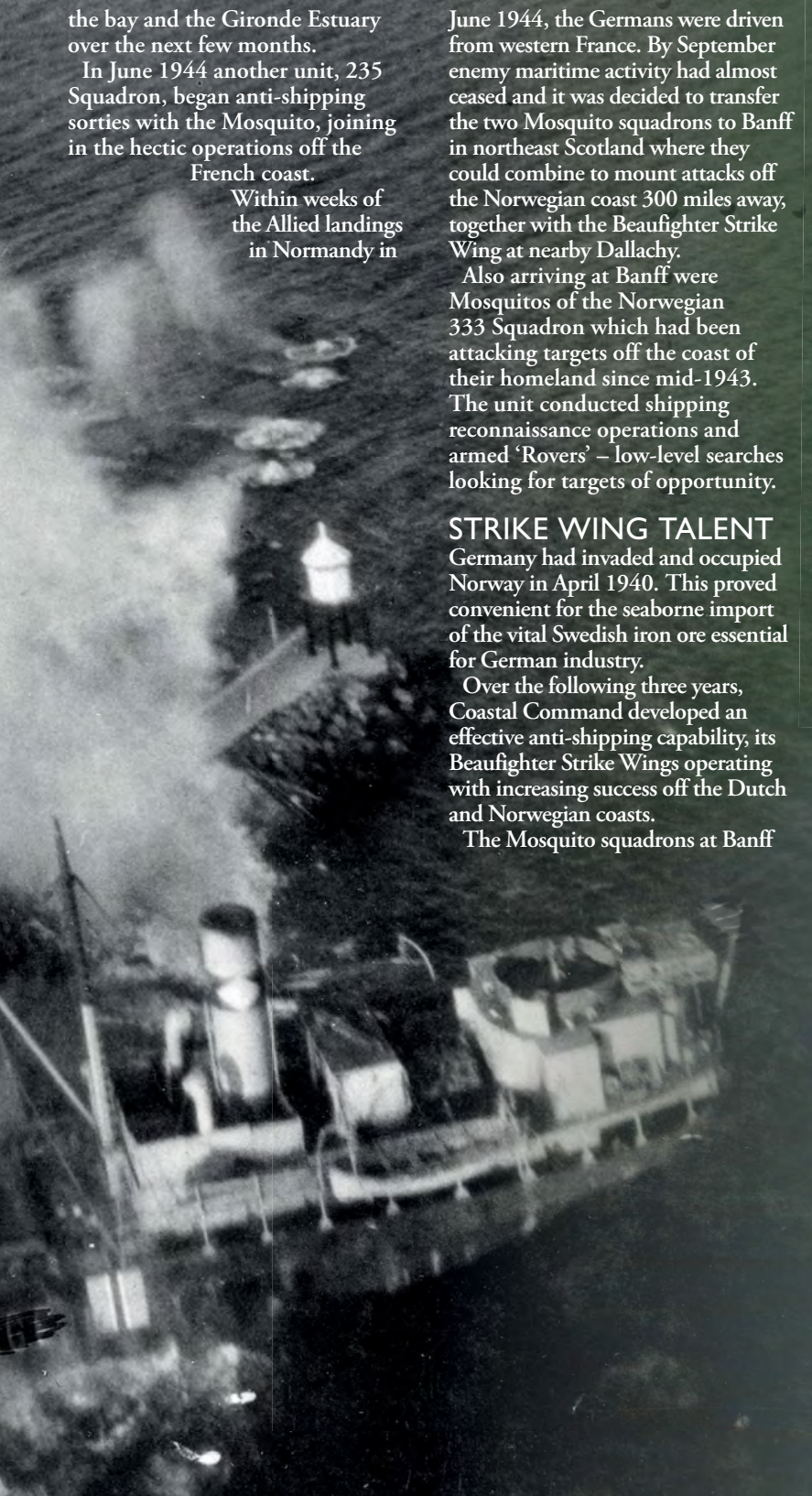
Banff was handed over to Coastal Command on September 1, 1944 when Gp Capt the Honourable J W 'Max' Aitken DSO DFC, a Battle of Britain veteran, son of Lord Beaverbrook, and highly experienced Beaufighter pilot, assumed command.

A New Zealander, Wg Cdr G D 'Bill' Sise DSO DFC, headed 248 Squadron and within weeks an Australian, Wg Cdr R A Atkinson DSO DFC, took command of 235 Squadron.

In charge of 333 Squadron was a Norwegian, Cdr Finn Lambrechts DFC. With their expertise and detailed knowledge of the Norwegian coast and fjords, 333's crews flew shipping reconnaissance sorties in coastal waters and as outriders ahead of the strike force.

### SIX-POUNDERS

The primary weapon by this time for 235 and 248 Squadrons was the armour-piercing rocket projectile ➔





**Above**  
Molins six-pound cannon  
in the nose of a Mosquito  
XVIII.

**Above right**  
Armourers load RPs onto  
a 143 Squadron Mosquito  
FB.VI.

**Below**  
A Mosquito FB.VI over  
Kraakhellesund after  
an attack on a German-  
controlled merchant  
vessel.



(RP). The units were ready for action by the middle of September 1944, and on the 14th a force of 21 Mosquitos joined the Dallachy Beaufighter Wing and headed for southern Norway.

Sighting an enemy convoy south of Kristiansand, they attacked, their combined firepower of torpedoes, RPs and cannons damaging a 3,000-ton merchant ship, another of 2,500 tons and three auxiliaries.

Four days later a similar formation hit two merchantmen escorted by an armed trawler. All three vessels were claimed as damaged, one seriously. The Mosquitos also flew anti-U-boat patrols and, while engaged on these sorties, successfully attacked any shipping that presented itself.

On September 24, four Mosquitos from 248 Squadron, led by Sqn Ldr J Maurice DSO DFC CdeG, struck vessels in Hjelte Fjord. Six-pounder rounds, cannons and machine guns hit a 1,500-ton merchantman and an armed trawler. Both were damaged and the trawler was left blazing

furiously.

Less than an hour later, seven more Mosquitos from 248 intercepted an 'M'-class minesweeper and an armed trawler and attacked them with the Molins gun, leaving both severely damaged.

On the 28th a torpedo boat flying a German flag caught fire and sank after being hit by six-pounders and cannons, the attack concluding a very successful first month for the new Banff Wing.

By October the Norwegian coast had become the focal point for anti-shipping operations. There were six strikes that month, the most outstanding being on the 9th when 18 Beaufighters and eight Mosquitos of the Banff Wing took off individually, crossed the North Sea in darkness and formed up at first light around flares dropped by an air-sea rescue Vickers Warwick.

The formation surprised a convoy of four merchant vessels and six escorts about to enter the Egersund anchorage. The raid was brilliantly

executed, sinking three merchantmen and an escort and severely damaging the remainder.

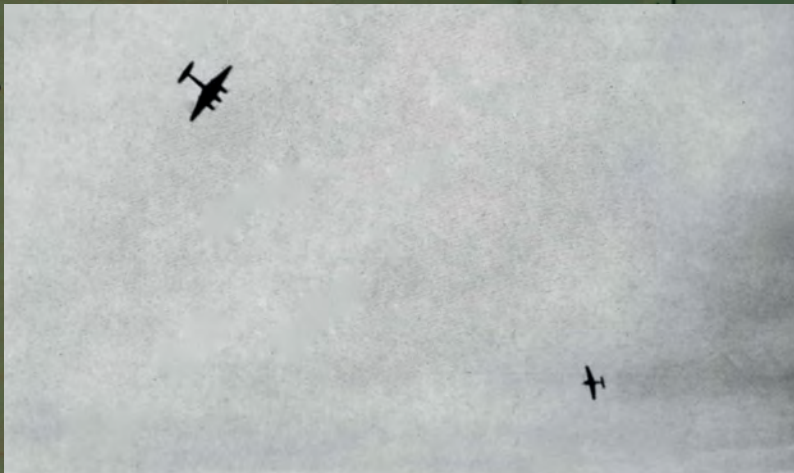
Six days later a large force of Beaufighters and Mosquitos sank a tanker and an escort near Kristiansand South. On October 21 a small force of 11 Mosquitos, four armed with the Molins gun, took on targets in the harbour at Haugesund. Two merchantmen were set on fire and seriously damaged.

The Banff Wing also made three other attacks on small ships, using formations of about 20 aircraft with six-pounders and 500lb (226kg) bombs as the main weapons. Throughout October the Mosquitos of 333 Squadron provided invaluable reconnaissance reports.

## OUTRIDERS

It soon became apparent that the RP-equipped Mosquito was proving its superiority over the Tsetse, so it was decided to equip all Mosquitos with RPs, although the refit programme would not be complete





**Left centre**  
A Mosquito and a Bf 109 engaging during the fierce air battle of Lister on January 11, 1945.

**Left**  
Wg Cdr Bill Sise and his navigator, Flt Lt Ray Price, of 248 Squadron.

**Below left**  
An armed merchant ship is hit by rockets at Aalesund.

**“Six-pounder rounds, cannons and machine guns hit a 1,500-ton merchantman and an armed trawler. Both were damaged and the trawler was left blazing furiously”**



for a few weeks. It was also decided to fly the Mosquito and Beaufighter Wings separately to take advantage of the former's superior range and speed.

With increased activity off the Norwegian coast, the Banff Wing had expanded by the end of October. Led by Wg Cdr E H McHardy DSO DFC\*, 143 Squadron transferred from the North Coates Wing on the Lincolnshire coast and its crews began converting from Beaufighters to Mosquitos.

Poor weather hampered operations in November but the value of the Norwegian crews, with their experience of the coastline, stood out on November 8 when two of 333 Squadron's Mosquitos acted as outriders flying ahead of a force of 24 Beaufighters. One of the pair sighted a number of enemy ships

in Midtugulen Fjord and led the Beaufighters over the mountains. Two merchant vessels were sunk and a third seriously damaged.

Seventeen Mosquitos sighted two small coasters and barges in Sogne Loch on November 17. Bombs, RPs, six-pounders and cannons left the coasters burning fiercely.

### TROOPSHIPS

By December it was clear the Germans were hurriedly moving whole divisions of the Wehrmacht southward by sea through the Kattegat for the defence of their homeland. To intercept them, the Mosquitos adopted 100-gallon (454-litre) drop tanks and modifications were made to their rocket rails to retain the capability to launch eight RPs.

Despite adverse weather there

were seven wing-strength strikes by the Mosquitos. During the afternoon of December 5 a force of 34 aircraft, led by Wg Cdr Sise, located shipping in Nordgulen Fjord. The surrounding high ground called for steep dives, but six vessels were damaged – including four merchantmen, two of which, of more than 3,000 tons each, were left burning savagely while others were damaged.

The force encountered fierce anti-aircraft fire and one Mosquito was lost while another crash-landed on return, killing the pilot.

More success came on the 12th when 22 Mosquitos, again led by Sise, used RPs against shipping in Eidsfjord: two large merchantmen were left ablaze. The next day a follow-up raid was ordered with Wg Cdr Atkinson, who had just received a Bar to his DFC, leading. As he dived at the head of the 18 Mosquitos, his aircraft took a direct hit from heavy anti-aircraft fire. He and his navigator perished. Sqn Ldr N Jackson-Smith then assumed temporary command of 235 Squadron before Wg Cdr A H Simmonds DFC arrived later in the month.

Four days later 16 aircraft attacked a 5,600-ton merchant vessel in Kraakhellesund with six-pounders and RPs. There was an explosion and fire, and a huge pall of smoke could still be seen from 30 miles away on the return flight. Later it was confirmed that the ship had sunk.

On Boxing Day, a dozen Mosquitos flew out after a Norwegian crew spotted two vessels moored off Liervik and





**Above**  
*'Maurice' - Max Guedj DSO  
DFC, CO of 143 Squadron.*

**Right**  
*A Mosquito FB.VI of 143  
Squadron attacks enemy  
shipping in Sandefjord.*

radioed back a report. Led by Sqn Ldr Jackson-Smith, the force hit both ships with six-pounders and RPs, registering many hits.

As the formation left the scene a large force of Focke-Wulf Fw 190s appeared and combats developed. One, and probably a second, fighter was shot down but a Mosquito failed to return.

Two more successful strikes were mounted before the end of the month, but increasing numbers of German fighters turned up towards the end of 1944 and losses in the Strike Wings began to mount. Mustangs of 315 (Polish) Squadron based at Peterhead provided an escort whenever possible and on occasion the Mosquitos had to give fighter cover for the more vulnerable Beaufighters.

### WINTER BLUES

On January 9, 1945 a formation of 17 Mosquitos sighted four merchantmen and three auxiliaries off Leirvik. Attacking with RP and cannon, they achieved more than 40 hits against the 5,165-ton *Claus Rickmers*, leaving her on fire. The Banff Wing returned on the 17th, hitting the ship again as well as other vessels.

As the Mosquitos were breaking away Fw 190s intercepted them and in the ensuing combats five Mosquitos went down in one of the biggest air battles over Norway. Three were from 143 Squadron, including its newly appointed CO, Wg Cdr Maurice – the alias of Jewish Free French Max Guedj. Considered by many to be



France's greatest wartime pilot in the RAF, he had flown more than 150 operations.

After the attack 248 Squadron relinquished its Tsetse Mosquitos. During the wing's next strike, on the 25th, 30-plus RP hits were made on a 5,100-ton merchant vessel in Eidsfjord. Reports later indicated the ship had sunk together with a smaller coaster.

The Luftwaffe then further strengthened its fighter squadrons in southern Norway by moving units from Vaernes, near Trondheim, and RAF losses mounted. The Poles of 315 Squadron had moved south to Andrews Field (Gt Saling), Essex, replaced by 65 Squadron; the C-in-C Coastal Command asked for another Mustang unit, but it was not until mid-February that 19 Squadron arrived at Peterhead.

Despite better weather in February, suitable targets remained scarce. Fifteen Banff Wing Mosquitos sank a small ship south of Leirvik and

seriously damaged a merchantman of 1,500 tons on the 21st.

Disappointing results were largely due to the enemy's use of remote and narrow fjords, making attacks more difficult, as well as the reduced daylight hours of the Norwegian winter.

### SPECTACULAR SUCCESS

February 1945 saw Wg Cdr C Foxley-Norris (later ACM Sir Christopher) arrive to take command of 143 Squadron. Bill Sise of 248 was meanwhile awarded a Bar to his DSO. As the most experienced commander in the wing, Sise had led many strikes. On one occasion he led two squadrons against a convoy in Floro harbour when one of his Mosquito's engines was set on fire by flak. He nevertheless pressed home his attack before returning 400 miles across the North Sea on the other engine.

At the end of February he was



## “Mustangs of 315 (Polish) Squadron based at Peterhead provided an escort whenever possible and on occasion the Mosquitos had to give fighter cover for the more vulnerable Beaufighters”



finally rested, having completed more than 150 ‘ops’. The citation for the Bar to his DSO described him as “a brilliant leader whose great gallantry and personal example and untiring efforts have done much to raise his squadrons to the highest standard of fighting efficiency”.

Excellent flying weather and an abundance of targets made March one of the most successful months for the Strike Wings. Flying with drop tanks and modified RP rails, the Mosquitos could go further, enabling them to reach shipping at sea and at anchorages in the Skagerrak and Kattegat as far east as the Oslo Fjord.

During the late morning of the 7th,

two outriders from 333 Squadron headed for the Skagerrak to report the weather and any targets. Thirty-four Mosquitos led by the newly appointed CO of 248 Squadron, Wg Cdr R Orrock DFC, followed them.

One of the Norwegian outriders spotted a convoy of eight heavily laden tank landing craft, which the main force attacked with RP and cannon – hitting seven, five of which sank. This spectacular success was followed by another ten days later.

Thirty-one Mosquitos took off in fine weather on the 17th bound for a build-up of shipping in Aalesund, reported by 333 Squadron. Using RP and cannon, they attacked vessels

ranging in size from 1,000 to 4,000 tons, sinking a 3,000-tonner plus two other ships and damaging another.

The Mosquitos encountered intense flak from shore batteries and two failed to return. One was Wg Cdr Orrock’s, hit while diving, and he was forced to ditch – he and his navigator were picked up and made prisoners of war. Jackson-Smith then took command of 248 Squadron.

The same day, a Norwegian Mosquito on a reconnaissance sighted a large barge towed by a tug. The pilot made two runs with cannon before achieving a direct hit with two 500lb bombs. Debris from the ensuing explosion hit the aircraft but the crew managed to reach base.

**Above**  
*Mustangs prepare to take off from Peterhead.*

**Below left**  
*Wg Cdr E Pierce (right), CO of 404 Squadron RCAF and his navigator, Charles Corder CGM.*

### INCREASING TONNAGE

With ten Mustangs as escort, 46 Mosquitos – led by Foxley-Norris – took off on March 23 and headed for the Skagerrak. The force split, a Norwegian outrider leading one section to Stadtlandet where a merchantman was badly damaged. Escorted to Dalsfjord, Sqn Ldr R Reid’s section found the 7,854-ton *Rotenfels* and set it on fire. Reid took a direct hit, killing him and his navigator.

The Norwegians of 333 Squadron were the first away on the 25th, heading for the coast of their homeland, seeking targets – Lt Nodeland finding a 6,000-ton tanker in Norangsfjord. Crews at Banff were duly briefed and 12 aircraft led by 235’s CO, Wg Cdr Simmonds, took off with a Mustang escort. Because of the steep cliffs in the fjord, the Mosquitos attacked in line astern, hitting the tanker and another ship.

A second strike later in the afternoon included a large fighter escort of Mustang IVs, and the formation, led by Jackson-Smith, headed east for Sognefjord with Norwegian outriders ahead.







**Right**  
A German Type XXI  
U-boat, one of four  
attacked in the Kattegat  
on April 19, 1945.



**“Despite intense return fire, he attacked and after three RP and cannon runs the submarine belched thick smoke and sank. The 13 survivors from U-843 included the captain who had been in the conning tower”**

On reaching the coast they were intercepted by more than 30 Luftwaffe fighters and a fierce engagement followed. The Banff Wing claimed three enemy shot down and the Mustangs accounted for at least two others.

But these successes came at considerable cost: Lt Cdr Knut Skavhaugen DFC, the very experienced leader of 333 Squadron, failed to return, along with Sqn Ldr G Stewart DFC, CO of 65 Squadron.

March ended with a large strike by 44 Mosquitos, led by Simmonds. Once again two Norwegian Mosquitos flew ahead, Lt T Erikson and Captain Hakon Wenger reporting a number of ships at Porsgrunn, the port used for the evacuation of German forces from Norway.

The Mosquitos attacked four merchant vessels while the Mustangs silenced nearby flak batteries. Two ships went down and the 2,643-ton *Scharhorn* was seriously damaged.

April would see no let-up in activity. Giving up its Beaufighters at Dallachy, 404 Squadron RCAF moved to Banff, having converted to the Mosquito under its CO, Wg Cdr E W Pierce.

There were five attacks that month. On the 2nd, Lt Plyhn of 333 Squadron reported vessels in Sandefjord, another south coast port used for the evacuation of German troops and one of the few anchorages with repair facilities. A force of 31 aircraft, led by Jackson-Smith, hit a concentration of shipping in the port,

mostly with RPs – sinking the 5,100-ton *Concordia* and 3,600-ton *William Blumer* and damaging other large vessels and a tanker.

The Norwegians of 333 had played a crucial role in seeking out targets and they continued to scour the southern fjords looking for build-ups of shipping heading for Germany. The squadron's new CO, the recently promoted Wenger, called in a strike against a convoy in the Kattegat on April 5.

Thirty-nine Mosquitos and 12 Mustangs attacked and scored many hits. Wenger's aircraft was hit and he headed for Sweden and crash-landed. A few days later he returned to Scotland and, in May, was awarded the DFC.

Intelligence later discovered that almost 900 men were lost in ships hit that day.

### U-BOATS ON THE SURFACE

At this stage of the war, with heavy bombing of German ports, more minefields and Coastal Command roaming in the Baltic, the last of the U-boats tried to escape to the open sea and into the Atlantic. On April 9, a large force, led by Sqn Ldr A Gunnis DFC of 248 Squadron, headed for the Skaggerak with a Mustang escort.

As the formation ran into the Kattegat, the leader saw two wakes 200 yards (182m) apart. Gunnis turned his men down-sun to attack an 'M'-class minesweeper leading four

fully surfaced U-boats. The main force tackled the submarines in a 15° dive, pulling out at 200ft. Two sections of 143 Squadron each targeted one of the leading U-boats, scoring many hits, and one of the subs settled by the stern.

By the time 248 Squadron turned in to the attack, the stricken U-boat's bows were out of the water. After the attack came a large explosion and the boat disintegrated, throwing up debris which damaged some aircraft and led to the loss of a Mosquito from the RAF Film Unit and its crew.

Both squadrons hit a second submarine. It turned hard starboard,



Below  
A rocket-armed  
Mosquito FB.VI of  
404 Squadron. ALL VIA  
AUTHOR UNLESS NOTED

rolled over and disappeared stern first: U-804 and U-1065 were lost with all hands and Gunnis was awarded a Bar to his DFC.

Soon after came another unexpected success. Fg Off A J Rendall had turned back early in the sortie to shepherd another Mosquito with a failed engine back to base. Having done so, he immediately set off to pursue the rest of the wing when, 20 miles out, he sighted another surfaced U-boat.

Despite intense return fire, he attacked and after three RP and cannon runs the submarine belched thick smoke and sank. The 13 survivors from U-843 included the captain who had been in the conning tower.

On April 11, after the crew of a 333 Squadron Mosquito reported more shipping activity at Porsgrunn, Simmonds led a force of 35 Mosquitos and 12 Mustangs. A Norwegian outrider guided the Mosquitos into the confines of the fjord where they succeeded in sinking four vessels.

The Mustangs dealt with fighter opposition, downing two Messerschmitt Bf 109Gs and driving the rest away, while two Mosquitos failed to return, one crash-landing in Sweden.

During the afternoon of the 19th, Simmonds was again leading a strong force, escorted by Mustangs, sighting an 'M'-class minesweeper leading four surfaced U-boats in line astern.

The Mosquitos set up an attack across the sun, firing RPs in a 10° dive. After hitting the submarines, smoke poured from one as some of the crew took to dinghies. Of the four, U-251 sank with all hands and

U-2335 limped into Kristiansand with extensive damage. Light flak had come from the U-boats and two Mosquitos made forced landings in Denmark and Sweden.

Out in strength on April 21, the wing was returning from an uneventful anti-shipping patrol in the Kattegat when the leader, Foxley-Norris, released the Mustang escorts, which headed for home. Within minutes, 18 torpedo-carrying Junkers Ju 88s and Heinkel He 111s were seen approaching the Scottish coast. The Mosquitos destroyed nine before the rest gained the sanctuary of the clouds.

### NO LET UP

As the war reached its climax in Germany, there was always the risk that German forces, still in control in Denmark and Norway, would attempt to prolong it. So there was no let-up for the Strike Wings as they harried shipping in the Skaggerak and the Kattegat. By now the Banff Wing had five Mosquito squadrons: 143, 235, 248, 333 (Norwegian) and 404 (RCAF).

Early on the morning of May 2, reports came in that U-boats were moving north in the Kattegat. Thirty-five aircraft, led by Sqn Ldr A G Deck DFC, took off, met their Mustang escort off Peterhead and headed east. In the target area they saw two surfaced small coastal U-boats of Type XXIII, and seven Mosquitos of 143 Squadron attacked, scoring at least 12 hits on one.

Four of 245 Squadron's crews hit the second submarine, and much debris was thrown in the air. Shortly afterwards, the holed U-2359, which was just four months old, sank, while

the second U-boat escaped with severe damage. Mosquitos of 333 and 404 Squadrons stood off to provide cover.

The Banff Wing's final strike came on May 4. Led by Foxley-Norris, soon to receive the DSO, more than 40 Mosquitos took part. Sighting two large merchantmen, a frigate and a flak ship north of Aarhus in the Kattegat, the Mosquitos sank the 3,000-ton *Wolfgang* and three escorts, badly damaging another large ship and two other escorts.

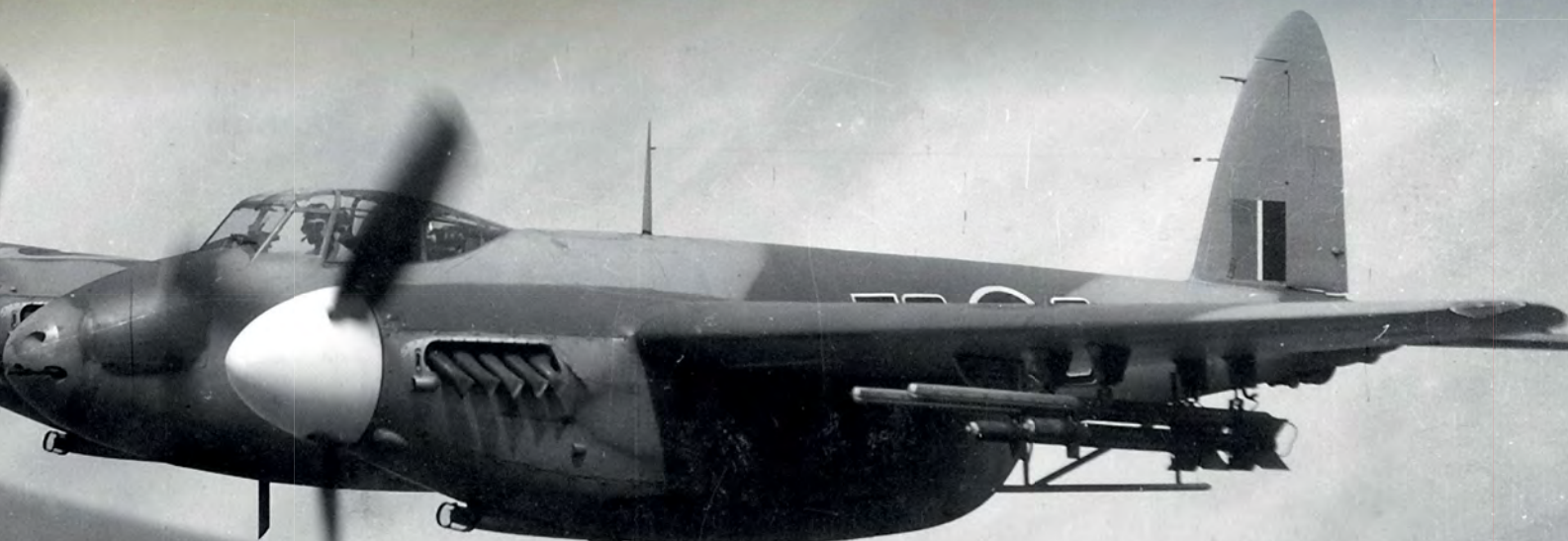
Group Captain Aitken had permission to take part in this last strike, completing a unique double by flying on the first day of the war as well as the wing's last operation.

In relating the role of the Mosquitos over Norway, it should be remembered that their neighbours at Dallachy and the North Coates Wing, each flying Beaufighters, made an equally impressive contribution to the anti-shipping war.

In his final Despatch, the C-in-C of Coastal Command, AM Sir William Sholto Douglas, wrote: "The combination of all forms of anti-shipping attack, their continuity and the extent to which they have been pressed home, have achieved results which could hardly have been anticipated."

Attacking enemy shipping and the supply routes for vital raw materials for German industry was dangerous work. The Mosquito men paid a heavy price but their skill and courage played a crucial role in the eventual collapse of the German war machine.

*The author thanks Lee Barton of the Air Historical Branch for his help during the research for this article.* ●



# SUBSCRIBE & SAVE



## 3 EASY WAYS TO ORDER...

THIS FANTASTIC SUBSCRIPTION OFFER!



ONLINE

[www.flypast.com](http://www.flypast.com)



PHONE

UK 01780 480404  
OVERSEAS +44 1780 480404  
FAX UK 01780 757812 OVERSEAS +44 1780 757812



POST

COMPLETE THE FORM AND POST TO:  
FLYPAST, KEY PUBLISHING LTD, PO BOX 300,  
STAMFORD, LINCS, PE9 1NA, UNITED KINGDOM

When you take  
out a **2 YEAR** or  
**DIRECT DEBIT**  
**SUBSCRIPTION** to

**FlyPast**

# MAKE HUGE SAVINGS

when you pay by easy Direct Debit – just **£10.25** every quarter or **£38.99** annually **plus free gift**

Free gift is only available on Direct Debit with a minimum 2 year subscription

**YES, I would like to subscribe to *FlyPast***

## PAYER'S DETAILS

Title [ ] First name [ ] Surname [ ]

Address [ ]

Postcode [ ] Country [ ]

Email address [ ]

Please complete to receive news updates and offers from us by email.

## DELIVERY DETAILS (IF DIFFERENT)

Title [ ] First name [ ] Surname [ ]

Address [ ]

Postcode [ ] Country [ ]

Email address [ ]

Gift choice Reunion of Giants DVD  Vulcan Test Pilot Book  Please send gift card

## SPECIAL OFFER (PLEASE TICK)

	12 FOR THE PRICE OF 10	24 ISSUES FOR THE PRICE OF 18
UK	12 issues <input type="checkbox"/> £45.00	24 issues <input type="checkbox"/> £79.99
Europe	12 issues <input type="checkbox"/> £53.00	24 issues <input type="checkbox"/> £90.99
USA	12 issues <input type="checkbox"/> \$69.99	24 issues <input type="checkbox"/> \$127.99
Rest of the World	12 issues <input type="checkbox"/> £55.00	24 issues <input type="checkbox"/> £92.99

## PAYMENT DETAILS

I enclose a cheque for £/\$ ..... made payable to Key Publishing Ltd

Please debit my Mastercard  Visa  for £/\$ .....

[ ][ ][ ][ ] [ ][ ][ ][ ] [ ][ ][ ][ ] [ ][ ][ ][ ][ ] [ ][ ][ ]

Expiry date Security Code (3 digit code on reverse of card)

[M][M][Y][Y] [ ][ ][ ]

OFFER CLOSE DATE: 31 MARCH 2017 PLEASE QUOTE: FP0317

Signature ..... Today's date .....

## INSTRUCTION TO YOUR BANK OR BUILDING SOCIETY TO PAY BY DIRECT DEBIT

Please tick:  UK Direct Debit  Quarterly £10.25  Annually £38.99



Instruction to your bank or building society to pay by Direct Debit



Please fill in the form and send to:  
Key Publishing Ltd, PO Box 300, Stamford, Lincolnshire, PE9 1NA, UK  
Name and full postal address of your bank or building society

To: The Manager	Bank/building society
Address	
Postcode	
Name(s) of account holder(s)	
Branch sort code	
Bank/building society account number	

Service user number

6 5 8 9 6 0

Reference

Instruction to your bank or building society

Please pay Key Publishing Ltd. Company Direct Debits from the account detailed in this Instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this Instruction may remain with Key Publishing Ltd. and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my bank/building society.

Signature(s)

Date

Banks and building societies may not accept Direct Debit Instructions for some types of account.

Image: IWM Duxford

## AMERICAN READERS

Readers in the USA may place orders by telephone **toll-free** 800-428-3003 or fax 757-428-6253 or by writing to Flypast, 3330 Pacific Ave, Ste 500, Virginia Beach, VA 23451-9828 · Alternatively, order online at [www.imsnews.com/flypast](http://www.imsnews.com/flypast) quoting/entering code **FP0317**

### Direct Debit UK only. If paying by Direct Debit please send in form.

Payments are accepted by Direct Debit, cheque, Postal Order, Credit Card and US Dollar check. Payments by credit or debit card will be shown on your statement as Key Publishing Ltd. Key Publishing will hold your details to process and fulfil your subscription order. Occasionally we may wish to contact you to notify you of special offers on products or events. If you do not wish to receive this information please tick here  or mention when calling. Gift subject to change. Any alternative gift will be of equal or higher value. Please note: Free gift is only available on Direct Debit with a minimum 2 year subscription. Should you cancel your subscription earlier than an invoice will be raised for the full price of the gift. 067/17



# NIGHT

## Hunters

WITH NO LESS THAN 20 'ACES' IN THE UNIT, 85 SQUADRON WAS ONE OF THE

MOST SUCCESSFUL MOSQUITO NIGHT-FIGHTER UNITS,

AS **ANDREW THOMAS** DESCRIBES

**Above**  
The distinctive hexagon badge of 85 Squadron. The Latin motto 'Noctu diuque Venamur', translates as: 'We hunt by day and night.'  
ALL VIA AUTHOR

**Above right**  
Just west of Essen on the night of December 12, 1944, Sqn Ldr Branse Burbridge and Flt Lt Bill Skelton shot down this Bf 110G-4. B A BURBRIDGE

The arrival of a single Mosquito II, W4087, gave 85 Squadron, equipped with Douglas Havoc night-fighters, a fleeting taste of the future on February 18, 1942. The aircraft arrived for trials with the unit, which was based at Hunsdon, Hertfordshire and led by Wg Cdr Gordon Raphael. The de Havilland twin had been modified with a Turbinlite searchlight fitted into the nose. In this guise, the elegant Mosquito was given an adverse report and W4087 was returned to 1422 Flight at Heston, Middlesex. The unit continued to use the bulky Douglas twins until August 15 when Mosquito II

DD718 arrived. Conversion to the Mosquito began, this time without the impractical Turbinlite.

By mid-September training had reached the stage where pilot and navigator could start to work as a team. On the 17th Fg Off Branse Burbridge DSO\* DFC\* and Sgt Webster took off in *H-for-Harry* for ground-controlled interception (GCI) practice.

In the early hours of October 19, more than 30 enemy aircraft raided East Anglia and 85 began its first action with the Mosquito. Flt Lt Nigel Bunting attacked and damaged a Junkers Ju 88, which limped away smoking.

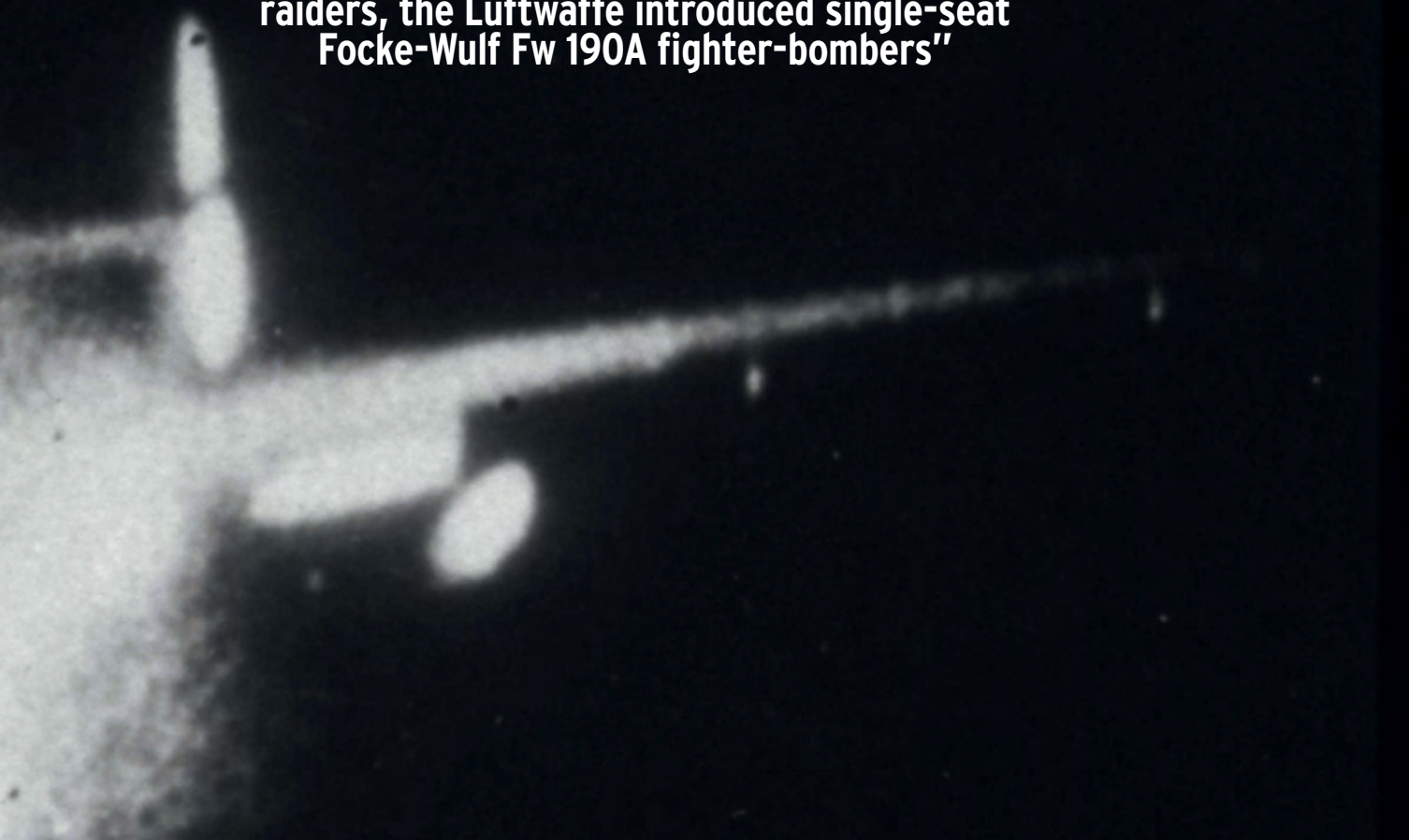
### FIRST VICTORY

It was not until the night of January 17/18, 1943 that 85 Squadron claimed the first of its many victories with the Mosquito. Appropriately it was the CO, Sqn Ldr Gordon Raphael, and his navigator W/O Nat Addison, who shot down a pathfinder Ju 88 of Kampfgeschwader 6 (KG 6).

A few days later Raphael handed over command to a night-fighting legend – Wg Cdr John Cunningham who arrived with his long-time navigator, Flt Lt Jimmy Rawnsley.



**“With Britain’s night defences, increasingly in the form of high-performance Mosquitos, taking an unacceptable toll of enemy raiders, the Luftwaffe introduced single-seat Focke-Wulf Fw 190A fighter-bombers”**



Enemy raids continued, but when 40 aircraft attacked London on March 3, 85’s crews had no joy. That month the unit formed ‘C’ Flight for high-altitude

operational trials with three specially modified Mk.XVs. On April 10 Flt Lt Bunting in MP469 reached 44,600ft but by August the high-flyers had been withdrawn.

Also during March, the unit began receiving Mosquito XIIs fitted with airborne interception (AI) Mk.VIII radar antenna housed in a nose-mounted ‘thimble’. The first Mk.XII victory came on the night of April 14/15 when Sqn Ldr Peter Green in *F-for-Freddie* shot down Dornier Do 217E ‘F8+AM’ from KG 40 off Clacton, Essex.

Also successful that night was Flt Lt Geoff Howitt and navigator Fg Off George Irving, who downed Uffz Tannenberger’s Do 217 ‘U5+DP’ of 6/KG 2 into the sea also off Clacton.



### SCHNELLBOMBERS

With Britain’s night defences, increasingly in the form of high-performance Mosquitos, taking an unacceptable toll of enemy raiders, the Luftwaffe introduced single-seat Focke-Wulf Fw 190A fighter-bombers. These Schnellbombers (fast bombers) were intended to penetrate the defences and assault targets in southern England. The Fw 190s were operated by Schnellkampfgeschwader 10 (SKG 10).

As a counter to this new threat, 85 Squadron moved to West Malling, Kent, on May 13, 1943. Three nights later I/SKG 10’s Focke-Wulfs

approached at low level over the Channel.

Sqn Ldr Green flying with F/Sgt Grimstone dispatched the first Fw 190 Schnellbomber to fall over England, engaging their victim near Dover while Flt Lt Howitt claimed another south of Hastings.

Chasing a third Fw 190 towards the French coast, Fg Off Bernard Thwaites with Plt Off Bill Clemo flying *L-for-London*, were recalled. The pair then spotted their prey as it passed them - they had overtaken it. Closing to 50 yards (45m) Thwaites sent it into the sea, although *London* was damaged by debris from the doomed fighter. ➔

**Above**  
Mosquito XII HK119 of 85 Squadron lifts off from Hunsdon, mid-1943. J D R RAWLINGS



**Above**  
The unit's first confirmed victory with the Mosquito was claimed by 85's CO Wg Cdr Gordon Raphael on January 17, 1943.  
VIA C F SHORES

**Above right**  
Sqn Ldr Bill Maguire, 85 Squadron, 1944.  
A J BROOKES

Thwaites and Clemo fired on another '190 and were able to claim it as a 'probable', although this appears to have later been upgraded by HQ Fighter Command. Fg Off Shaw bagged another for 85's impressive tally.

Fears of the Schnellbomber threat had been dramatically dispelled. A couple of nights later one of the unit's promising teams, Fg Off John Lintott and Sgt George Gilling-Lax shot down another Fw 190A, from 2/SKG 10, one of 13 that were raiding the South East.

This almost personal battle with SKG 10 continued in the early hours of May 22 when Sqn Ldr Edward Crew was scrambled to the southeast by GCI. He reported: "We ended up at about 3,000ft and, with no joy, were about to give up the chase when we gained an AI contact well below and off to our starboard.

"I immediately reduced speed and descended and spotted the moon reflecting off his canopy! I positioned below and behind and identified it as a Focke-Wulf 190 – a tricky opponent.

"I got in about 100 yards behind him and fired a short burst with the immediate effect of causing a large flash following which it turned as I fired again, this causing one of his undercarriage legs to fall down.

"As I was positioning for another

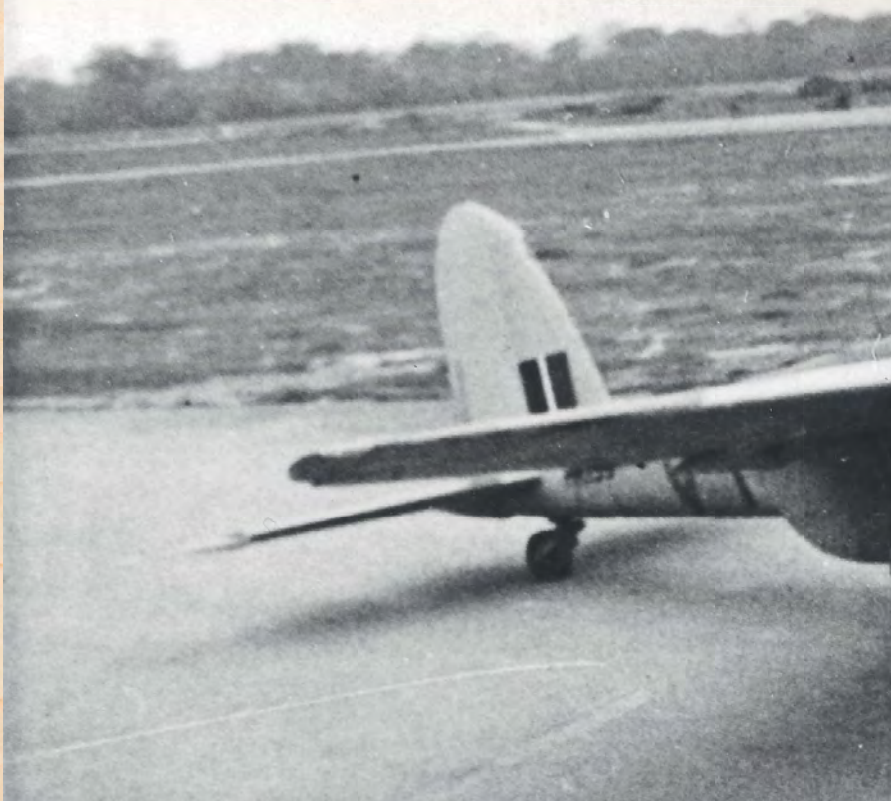
attack, it just turned over and went into the sea with a terrific splash. Sadly, there was no sign of the pilot."

A week later Lintott and Gilling-Lax in HK119 brought down the first of the fast Ju 88s to fall over England, 'NL+EX' of I/KG 66 near Lewes in East Sussex. The pair had to climb to 29,000ft before gaining contact. Apparently they hit the bomber's nitrous oxide tanks, which exploded. Sadly these rising stars were lost on the night of July 9/10 after claiming a Do 217 near Detling, Kent.

### CUNNINGHAM'S OPENER

On the night of June 13/14, 1943, Wg Cdr Cunningham, 85's CO, with navigator Flt Lt Rawnsley made their first claim on the Mosquito. Flying DZ302 they attacked Lt Ulrich's Fw 190 of 3/SKG 10 at 23,000ft. Using just 20 rounds, Cunningham must have hit the fighter's controls as it reared upwards, flicked and fell near Wrotham, Kent. Ulrich survived to become a prisoner of war.

Raids by Fw 190s continued through the month. On June 21 three penetrated as far as London but 85's Flt Lt Bill Maguire shot





Below  
Mosquito XVII HK352  
taxiing at West Malling,  
early 1944. VIA C F  
SHORES

down 'GP+LA' of 2/SKG 10; it crashed into the Medway estuary.

A few weeks later a fast new Luftwaffe bomber made its appearance in English skies in the elegant shape of the Messerschmitt Me 410. On July 13 one came in over Dover and Bunting tracked it towards the Essex coast, picking out the glow of the exhaust. Closing to 200 yards Bunting opened fire from below and critically hit 'U5+KG' of V/KG 2. It went vertically into the sea off Felixstowe, Suffolk – the first of its type brought down over Britain. Two nights later, Thwaites shot down another, 'U5+CJ'.

### FIRST 'ACE'

Countering the small-scale intrusions continued through the summer and the highly effective night defences took a steady toll. Thwaites and Clemo were victorious again on the night of September 8, 1943 on a patrol off Foreland, Kent.

Vectored onto a contact about 15 miles (24km) away, while closing in Thwaites gained a fleeting visual contact with a Fw 190 carrying long-range tanks. Easing the nose back, he opened fire from dead

astern at 80 yards and had the satisfaction of seeing the fuselage and engine burst into flames; it fell away in a spin to crash into the sea.

With virtually no time to congratulate themselves, they were quickly directed to another enemy 8 miles away. Eventually Clemo gained a contact, which turned out to be a violently evading Fw 190.

It went into a steady climb and from astern Thwaites once more brought the Mosquito's nose up and opened fire from 100 yards. Flames ran along the Fw 190's wings and fuselage before it fell away and crashed into the sea. Thwaites had become the first pilot in Fighter Command to claim five victories on the Mosquito.

Shortly before on September 2, Fg Offs Burbridge and Bill Skelton had their first trip together in a Mosquito. It was the start of what was to be the most successful RAF night-fighting team of the war. Their first contact with the Luftwaffe came on October 17, but having just gained a 'visual' they suffered a cutting starboard engine and had to disengage.

During October Luftwaffe raiders struck on 21 nights, 500 sorties, all

against London. The Ju 188 was introduced to the fray.

The heaviest raid came on the night of the 7th/8th when 85's 'A' Flight mounted eight defensive sorties. Sqn Ldr Maguire in *E-for-Easy* had a lengthy fight with a Me 410, possibly 10185 'U5+KG' of 16/KG 2. Spotting the enemy 900ft below him, Maguire dived but after a hectic combat lost it near Hastings, East Sussex; although another crew saw it fall into the sea.

A week later Maguire brought down Ju 188 '3E+BL' of I/G 66 near Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Fg Off Hugh Thomas took out '3E+HH' at Birchington, Kent.

Over the next three weeks the Luftwaffe lost 28 aircraft to the increasingly efficient defences. The margin of performance by the Mosquito was relatively small against the new fast raiders, so skilful flying and use of AI was essential to achieve success.

### 'BABY BLITZ'

On the second night of the New Year, Cunningham and Rawnsley were flying Mk.XII HK374 which had a trial fit with nitrous oxide injection to boost performance, ➔

**"As I was positioning for another attack, it just turned over and went into the sea with a terrific splash. Sadly, there was no sign of the pilot"**







**Right**  
Wg Cdr Branse Burbridge, right, who attributed much of this success to his navigator and lifelong friend, Sqn Ldr Bill Skelton. B A BURBRIDGE



**Right centre**  
Wg Cdr John Cunningham (right) and his navigator, Flt Lt Jimmy Rawnsley. VIA C F SHORES



**Below**  
With its distinctive extended wing tips, high altitude Mosquito XV DZ385 was one of a few that served with 85 Squadron's 'C' Flight. A&AEE



and destroyed a Me 410 off Le Touquet. This was Cunningham's final confirmed victory, the bulk having been achieved on Beaufighters.

There were sterner tests ahead for the RAF night-fighter force.

starboard turn and descended and eventually saw a Messerschmitt 410. "I managed to get directly behind him and gave a long burst and, as I had not got this close since my Havoc days, I wanted to make sure of it. I need not have worried as its left hand engine promptly

From its new base 85 began operations over the Continent hunting Luftwaffe

night-fighters in their own backyard. Wg Cdr Charles Miller had assumed command in March, and appropriately he opened the squadron's 'book' in its new role in Mosquito XIX MM642 on June 11 by downing a Bf 110 near Melun airfield in France.

One of the enemy responses to the invasion of France was to begin, on June 12, launching large numbers of V-1 flying-bombs against towns and cities in the south of England. These weapons were referred to as 'Divers' by the RAF and a number of Mosquito night-fighter units were tasked to 'anti-Diver' duties through the summer.

On the night of January 21/22, 1944 the Luftwaffe launched the Operation 'Steinbock' (Capricorn) offensive against London with 447 sorties. This episode became known to the British as the 'Baby Blitz'.

That night 85 launched four of its Mk.XVIIIs against the raid. The unit had re-equipped with the new variant the previous November.

It was the end of January when the next big assault occurred and there were eight sizeable attacks during February. By then the Luftwaffe was making extensive use of 'Window', radar-reflecting foil strips, which made the night-fighters' task more complex.

On February 23 around 60 bombers headed for London. In the early hours Flt Lts Burbridge and Skelton in *Y-for-Yoke* were nearing the end of their patrol from West Malling when they had a contact.

Branse Burbridge described it to the author: "After a frustrating sortie we were over the sea and heading back home when Bill gained an AI contact, so I quickly pulled into a

burst into flames, which quickly spread and with a mixture of sadness and elation we saw it explode with considerable violence and go down.

"After the first hits Bill and I saw one of the crew bale out and he went just over the top of us. I was glad that someone did get out. That was my first one."

### FLYING BOMBS

Attacks continued through March and into April 1944; for example on March 14 about 140 enemy aircraft were operating over England. Despite the best efforts of the Luftwaffe, the night skies over England had been well defended during the build up to the invasion.

Bomber Command suffered its greatest loss of the war on the night of March 30/31 in the skies around Nuremberg; 95 bombers failed to return. In the wake of this raid it was decided to allocate further Mosquito night-fighter squadrons to 100 Group for bomber support. Accordingly, 85 Squadron moved to Swannington, Norfolk, on May 1.

**Right**  
Fg Off 'Ginger' Owen's first claim with 85 Squadron was a V-1 flying-bomb. A J OWEN





following the explosion of a missile so, to compensate, we resorted to closing one eye before opening fire.”

From Swannington, 85 returned to West Malling on July 21 to be closer to the action. Fg Off Phillip Kendall brought down a V-1 on the 27th while the following night Fg Off Dickie Goucher and Sqn Ldr Maguire each bagged one over the Channel.

Flying Mk.XIX TA400 on the night of August 4/5 were Fg Offs ‘Ginger’ Owen and McAllister. At 9,000ft over Kent they spotted a V-1 and fired a short burst causing it to crash near Tenterden. In all 85’s crews claimed 39 and a half V-1s before the crisis passed. The unit

Left  
Norwegian Capt Svein Heglund joined 85 Squadron in 1944.  
N MATHISRUD



returned to Norfolk to resume its bomber support activities over the Continent in late August.

Above  
Flt Lt Bernard Thwaites was one of 85 Squadron’s night-fighting elite. 85 SON RECORDS

## HUNDRED UP

Branse Burbridge, who had been promoted to squadron leader, and Flt Lt Skelton claimed a night-fighter over the Baltic on September 11, 1944. This was probably Ju 88G-1 712195 ‘D9+BH’ of Nachtjagdgeschwader 7 (NJG 7) flown by Fw Reinold Schemmer and crew, who were lost.

At Swannington 85 received a considerable boost when Capt Svein Heglund, the most successful Norwegian Spitfire pilot, arrived. The first of his three night victories came on December 5 as he recorded: “Escort for bombers bombing Karlsruhe and Heilbronn. Picked up several contacts around airfield east of target, but most seemed to be friendly. Bombing very good.

“Got contact on ‘Hun’ aircraft northeast of Heilbronn. Chased it for ten minutes. Very dark and ➔

## WG CDR BRANSE BURBRIDGE



As this feature was being prepared we learned of the death of Wg Cdr Branse Burbridge. He was the most successful Mosquito and Allied night-fighter pilot of World War Two.

Burbridge left the RAF soon after the war and went to Oxford University to read history. A committed Christian, he served the Christian Scripture Union for the rest of his working life.

A kind, gentle and modest man, Branse Burbridge passed away aged 95 after a long illness on November 9, 2016.

Branse Burbridge in 1942.

In June, 85 Squadron switched from supporting the 100 Group’s bomber campaign and initially flew patrols against V-1s from Swannington. On the night of the 25th one of 85’s Norwegian pilots, Capt Tarald Weisteen, flying MM636 brought down the unit’s first ‘Diver’. With seven destroyed, Weisteen became 85’s most successful pilot against the flying-bombs.

On the night of July 18/19 Burbridge with Skelton were on patrol and chased two V-1s, being credited with one destroyed. Burbridge recalled a problem of night V-1 operations: “One difficulty was loss of night vision



NINE YEARS OF MOSQUITOS



Mosquito NF.36 RL148 resplendent in colourful 85 Squadron markings at West Malling in mid-1951. M J F BOWYER

At the end of the war 85 Squadron, under Wg Cdr W K Davison, was retained as a permanent part of Fighter Command. Initially based at Tangmere, Sussex, with Mosquito NF.36s, in April 1947, by which time Sqn Ldr P F Allen was at the helm, 85 returned to West Malling where it remained for many years.

Under Sqn Ldr W A Griffiths the unit soldiered on into 1951 by which time its Mosquitos were decorated with red and black chequer markings. The first Gloster Meteor NF.11s began arriving in September 1951 and on November 9 the departure of NF.36s RL213 and RL255 brought an end to 85 Squadron's nine-year Mosquito era.



shot down a Ju 88 after a lengthy chase. They found another contact northeast of Dortmund and fired a long burst from behind; Ju 88G '2Z+CP' of 5/NJG 6 exploded.

This was Goucher's fifth success in less than a month. Debris from the second victim hit his Mosquito and they had to struggle back on one engine, making an emergency landing at Brussels.

Burbridge and Skelton downed a Ju 88 southwest of Ludwigshafen on January 2. This was Burbridge's 21st victory, making him the RAF's most successful night-fighter pilot.

He recalled the combat to the author: "Flying west of Mannheim, Bill Skelton obtained a contact off to starboard at about our level, some 15,000ft. We closed in behind the aircraft that was weaving gently and flying towards the target, Nuremberg.

"Bill identified it though our binoculars as a Ju 88, so I closed in and gave a short burst of no more than a half second that set the fuselage on fire. It then spiralled down in flames, breaking into three distinct burning pieces to explode in the ground. On return I found that we had fired just two dozen rounds."

Having claimed his first 'kill' in October 1943 Flt Lt Hugh Thomas bagged his fifth, a Ju 88, west of Lutzendorf on April 8, becoming the

last RAF night-fighter ace of the war.

In his combat report Thomas said: "I saw an aircraft going down in flames and I decided that there was a fair chance of there being at least one 'Hun' in the area – and this proved to be the case, for within a few seconds we had an AI contact slightly below us.

"We turned in behind it and followed it from about 800ft, I could identify it clearly as a Ju 88. I fired one burst dead astern with no deflection and this produced a very bright explosion and caused it to shed pieces and lose speed very quickly.

"I orbited port and awaited the prang. This occurred in a very satisfactory manner when it hit the ground with a beautiful explosion over the Thuringian Plain."

This was brief glory for Thomas. On April 13 he was shot down by a Luftwaffe night-fighter. He baled out to become a prisoner of war. Sadly, his navigator, Fg Off Charles Hamilton, landed in the sea and was lost.

With the Third Reich disintegrating, things began to run down with the unit flying its last 'ops' of war on the night of May 2. One of the leading Mosquito units, 85 Squadron had among its alumni some of the most successful night-fighter pilots of the war, including no fewer than 20 aces. ●

**Above right**  
Aircrew of 85 Squadron's 'A' Flight at West Malling in 1943. 85 SON RECORDS

**Below**  
Mosquito XXX NT484 of 85 Squadron at Swannington in the spring of 1945.

overshot it three times. Shot it down in flames east of Heilbronn. We were shot at and hit by flak over Bruxelles. They thought us a 'Doodlebug'. One Me 110 destroyed"

Another of 85's pilots claimed the same night when Flt Lt Goucher dispatched two Bf 110s giving each several short bursts. Flt Lt Owen's victory against a Ju 88 over Krefeld was 85 Squadron's century!

Burbridge and Skelton destroyed a Bf 110G-4 of 3/NJG 6 captained by Obfw Pleige on the night of December 22 during a raid on Krefeld. That night the laurels went to 'Ginger' Owen, who brought down a Bf 110 and two Ju 88s - the new AI Mk.X fitted to the unit's Mosquito XXXs was clearly of benefit.

**LAST ACE**

On the evening of New Year's Day 1945, during a raid against the Ruhr, Flt Lts Goucher and 'Tiny' Bullock

